

Bosnia and Herzegovina: (re)gain mobility through the spaces of welfare

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Abstract

The research project aims to investigate the intersections between im/mobility and the welfare system in a 'transit country', addressing the following research questions: what relationship exists between in/formal welfare production and mobility? How is "waiting" shaped within welfare spaces? Space, territory and time are crucial analytical tools of both welfare and mobility studies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, two different narratives inform the production of services for migrants and asylum seekers and the reception context: first, a securitarian narrative implemented through the construction of Temporary Reception Centers, hotspot-like infrastructures funded by the EU and managed by IOM in close cooperation with Bosnian institutions; second, a humanitarian approach carried out by INGOs and local NGOs, which provide only for basic needs. Differences at sub-national level can be found in time, with the opening and closing of in/formal spaces of welfare, but also in space. In fact, each Canton of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, given the great autonomy that characterizes these sub-national institutions in providing services, has organized migration management independently. The differences in Cantonal reception assemblages intersect migrants' im/mobility within the Federation. Mobility and fixity are part of migrants' 'fragmented journeys' (Collyer and de Haas 2012). Fixity is strictly intertwined with the concepts of 'situational waiting' and 'border waiting' (Jacobsen et al. 2021), which shape the migrant's subjectivities during the experience of immobility within Bosnian territory as a result of the violent pushbacks at the Croatian border. The study aims to answer the research questions through ethnographic work 'in place' (Salazar et al. 2017), lasting ten to twelve months, based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Access to the field will be gained by volunteering at a local NGO based in Sarajevo, which provides migrants with washing machines, showers and distributes clothes. The focus on welfare spaces also has a practical implication as an entry point into the research field. In fact, it is precisely by being immersed in these places, that it is possible to get in contact with migrants and asylum seekers, collecting their accounts on the 'tactics' (de Certeau 1988; Vigh 2009) to (re)gain mobility in a moving environment, through their ability to establish, within these places, a "degree of plurality and creativity" and to draw "unexpected results" from this situation (de Certeau 1988).

Biography

Riccardo Sacco is a PhD candidate in Global Studies: Economy, Society and Law at the University of Urbino "Carlo Bo" in Italy. His fields of interest are border studies, critical approaches to 'transit migration' and the temporal dimensions of migrants' im/mobility.